Books

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'DIRTY WORK 2: THE CIA IN AFRICA'

Edited by Ellen Ray, William Schaap, Karl Van Meter and Louis Wolf
Lyle Stuart, 1979, 523 pages, $20

By KEVIN J. KELLEY

"The dilemma for Western powers in postcolonial Africa," writes Philip Agee in his introduction to "Dirty Work 2," was not so different from that in other continents: how to preserve strategic national interests while appearing to respect the right of independence and national sovereignty demanded by today's standards of international conduct.

"Rarely could they do both," Agee continues. "Almost invariably the Western powers have perceived radical nationalism and communist support to nationalist movements as threatening their interests. Respect for African independence has seldom interfered with measures to counter such threats. Time and again, through secret intervention, overt military action and support for client regimes, the Western powers have sought to retain control in Africa. . . ."

The essays, news articles and interviews compiled in "Dirty Work 2" provide considerable supporting documentation for Agee's thesis. By presenting both an overview of covert intervention in Africa and specific historical examples of methods and tactics, the book gives concrete and detailed expression to the realities of U.S. imperialism.

Real people have been murdered by European and U.S. intelligence networks. Actual governments and social systems have been created and destroyed by outside powers for their own interests. Malnutrition, illiteracy, infant mortality and abject poverty are perpetuated and often exacerbated in the name of "defending freedom" or "promoting economic development."

Take, for example, the case of Patrice Lumumba in the Congo—a kind of prototype of covert operations in Africa cited by several selections in the book.

A militant nationalist, Lumumba earned the displeasure of the CIA and its counterparts in France and Belgium by advocating genuine self-determination for this former colony. Because of large economic investments by Western corporations in the Congo, Lumumba's insistence on using indigenous resources for the betterment of his people was judged an intolerable arrogance. Belgium may have been forced to grant nominal independence to the Congo, but such a paper declaration was never intended by the West to signify the right of the Congolese to build their own social structures and to control their economic and political destiny.

'DIRTY TRICK' EMPLOYED

Belgium, France and the U.S., acting through their respective intelligence agencies, reserved those prerogatives for themselves. Attempts were made initially to somehow pressure Lumumba into adopting a more "reasonable and compromising" stance. When these failed, more direct and less subtle methods were applied. Alternative, pliant "leaders" were chosen and groomed to take over the country. Various "dirty tricks" were employed to weaken Lumumba's base, while money and logistical support flowed to the puppets who were waiting to play their part in making the Congo safe for multinational investments.

Surely, the CIA and its cohorts would have preferred to avoid outright military conflict, for that is a particularly messy option which tends to expose the forces at work and which makes future subversions more difficult. But open combat did break out in the Congo. Lumumba was killed by the agencies and their hired hands. A client regime was installed. And business as usual was resumed in the former colony, although it now was permitted to call itself an independent nation.

As other essays in the book demonstrate, this general scenario—with some refinements and a few local variations—has been evident in at least a score of African nations during the past 30 years. As the foremost imperial power, the U.S. usually directs operations through its shadow army, the Central Intelligence Agency.

A few European nations have a more immediate colonial inheritance in Africa, however. So sometimes France, Britain and Portugal have taken charge in overthrowing

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